



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Chugach
National
Forest

3301 'C' Street
Suite 300
Anchorage, AK 99503-3998

File Code: 1950

Date: October 23, 2003

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Chugach National Forest is seeking public comment on the Resurrection Creek Stream and Riparian Restoration Project along a 0.8-mile segment of Resurrection Creek. The project is located five miles upstream from Hope, Alaska. Figure 1 shows the project area location.

Scoping Process

Two previous scoping efforts have occurred for this project. The first effort began on February 5, 2003, and the second on June 6, 2003. Since these scoping comment opportunities were provided to the public, the Forest Service has gathered more information regarding this proposal. Subsequently the Forest Service has determined that the appropriate level of analysis for this proposal is an environmental impact statement.

Comments will be accepted during the 30-day scoping period. Those who provided comments to the previous scoping notices that wish to supplement their earlier comments are encouraged to do so. However, previous comments on this proposal will still be used in the analysis process. Comments that are site-specific in nature are most helpful to resource professionals when trying to narrow and address the public's issues and concerns. Comments will be reviewed and issues identified. Issues that cannot be resolved by mitigation or minor changes to the proposed action may generate alternatives to the proposed action. This process is driven by comments received from the public, other agencies, and internal Forest Service concerns.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need for action of the Resurrection Creek Stream and Riparian Restoration Project is to accelerate the recovery of riparian areas, and fish and wildlife habitat on a 0.8 mile segment of Resurrection Creek. Natural recovery from mining impacts has been minimal on this segment of Resurrection Creek. Historic placer mining operations have affected Resurrection Creek by straightening and simplifying the stream, and separating it from its floodplain. These impacts have degraded fish rearing and spawning habitat on Resurrection Creek, as well as adjacent wildlife riparian habitat for species such as bears and eagles. Natural recovery from mining impacts has been minimal on this segment of Resurrection Creek. The proposed project would greatly accelerate the recovery of riparian areas, and fish and wildlife habitat on Resurrection Creek. There is a need to examine a portion of the creek immediately downstream of the project area on private land within the Haun Trust lands. Additional restoration activities may be implemented on the Haun Trust lands if the landowners have sufficient interest in implementing restoration measures.



Description of the Proposed Action

The proposed actions to meet the purpose and need include: (1) providing access for heavy equipment, which might include one or two temporary bridges or stream crossings over Resurrection Creek and/or Palmer Creek; (2) mechanical manipulation and grading of up to approximately 140,000 cubic yards of mine tailings to recover floodplain width and elevations; (3) excavation of a meandering river channel and adjacent side channels, including the development of a channel with instream pools and spawning habitat; (4) harvesting up to 5,000 trees, with and without root wads, for use on the new river channel and floodplain. Trees would be taken primarily from the project area. If constraints to harvest at the project area are high, additional off-site harvest in areas that have gone through a separate NEPA analysis might be needed; (5) replacing soils and organics stripped away during historic placer mining operations. Soil enhancement would improve growing conditions for native plant communities in constructed floodplains and riparian areas. Soil and sod would likely be gathered from source areas both within and outside the project area; (6) thinning existing overstocked riparian sapling spruce and cottonwood stands adjacent to Resurrection Creek; and (7) re-vegetation of native plant species on constructed floodplains and riparian areas. Natural re-vegetation (without planting) would be used where seed sources and site conditions are favorable. Where such conditions are lacking, the site would be planted.

Nature of Decision to Be Made

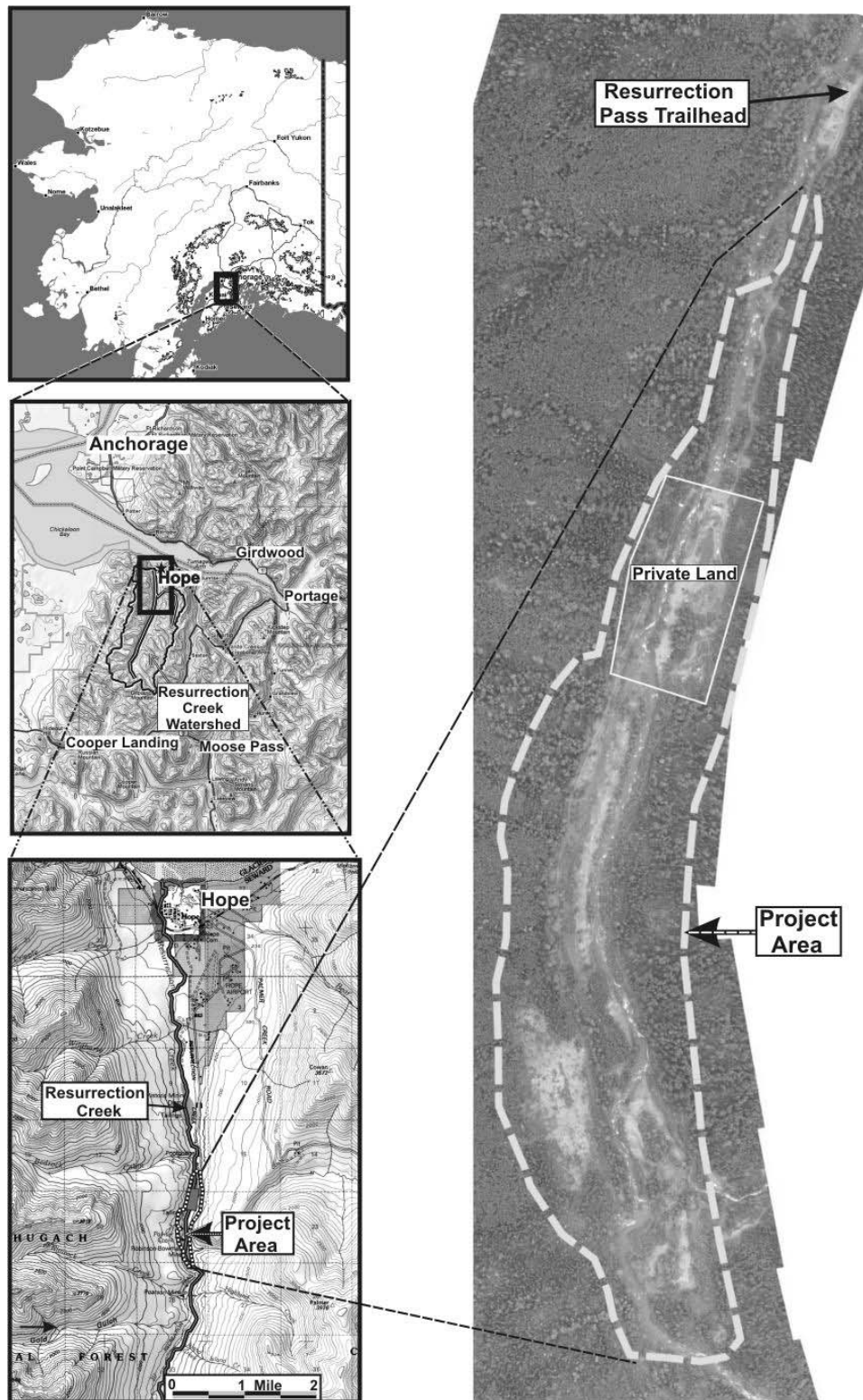
The Resurrection Creek Stream and Riparian Restoration Project environmental impact statement will evaluate site-specific management proposals, consider alternatives, and analyze the effects of the activities proposed in these alternatives. It will form the basis for the Responsible Official to determine; (1) whether or not the proposed activities and alternatives are responsive to the issues, are consistent with Forest Plan direction, meet the purpose and need, and are consistent with other related laws and regulations directing National Forest Management Activities; (2) which actions, if any, to approve; (3) and, whether or not the information in the analysis is sufficient to implement proposed activities.

Preliminary Issues

Preliminary Issues were developed based on past public scoping efforts for the project area, issues developed for similar projects, and Forest Service concerns and opportunities identified by resource specialist. These issues include the following:

1. Direct short-term impacts to fish and their habitat from construction activities.
Possible impacts to fish and their habitat are temporary loss of habitat, turbidity during construction activities could cause gill abrasion. Some fish will be stranded and buried.
2. Methyl mercury may be present in the project reach. Elemental mercury was used historically to separate fine gold from the “black sands” after the sands had been sorted from the stream gravels. Over time, some elemental mercury may have converted to the more toxic form of methyl mercury. Potential may exist for a release of methyl mercury during restoration, which might be a hazard to fish, wildlife, and the public.

Figure 1. Vicinity maps for the proposed Resurrection Creek Restoration Project.



3. Presence of heavy equipment could impact adjacent landowners and their resort business during construction of the channel and floodplain. Restoration activities during construction may create noise, and dust. The dust could impact visual quality from the private lands. The noise from construction could impact the landowners and their resort customers.
4. Lack of an easement through ¼ mile of private lands to access the project area on the east side of Resurrection Creek. The Forest Service currently has an easement through these private lands along the west side of Resurrection Creek. Project implementation will require access to both the east and west sides of the creek. Accessing the project area on the east side of Resurrection Creek may require reaching an agreement with the landowners, or building a road around the private lands, or constructing two temporary bridges or other crossings over Resurrection Creek.
5. Examine the potential of additional restoration/construction activities on private lands immediately downstream from the project area.
6. Recreational mining has potential to damage/erode the channel after reconstruction is complete. There is a need to consider limitations on recreational mining activities that have potential to impact the newly created and vegetated stream banks. A potential limitation to this activity would be to issuing a closure order on recreation mining in the restoration area.
7. Heritage Resources- Construction activities have the potential for disturbing and/or damaging undiscovered mining artifacts and prehistoric cultural artifacts and sites within the project area.
8. Other issues include impacts to recreationists during construction, impacts to scenery during and after construction, impacts to water quality, impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, introduction of noxious weeds, impacts to wetlands, and how to dispose of excess tailings.

These issues may be modified as additional comments are received during scoping. A range of alternatives will be considered after public comments are received and analyzed.

We are interested in your thoughts and ideas on this project. If you wish to comment, please mail or e-mail written comments, **postmarked no later than November 24, 2003**, to:

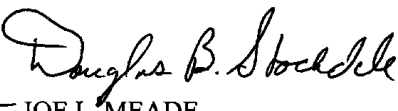
Dave Blanchet, Project Coordinator
Resurrection Creek Restoration Project
3301 C Street, Suite 300
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-3998

dblanchet@fs.fed.us

We plan to issue our draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for this project in January 2004. Once published, the DEIS will be made available for review on the Chugach National Forest Web Site. This site is located at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/Chugach>. Once at the website, navigate to "Current Projects and News Releases", then to "Resurrection Creek Stream Restoration", and then to DEIS. Other important documents relating to the project are also found at this site including the October 17, 2003 Notice of Intent (NOI) for the project to the Federal Register. This NOI explains procedures for commenting on the DEIS when it becomes available.

The Forest will also provide limited CD's and printed copies of the DEIS. In order to receive a CD or hardcopy please notify Dave Blanchet at the addresses noted above, or by calling (907) 743-9538. If we receive no reply from you concerning the DEIS format type you prefer by November 24, 2003, we understand that you have chosen to access the document on the Forest Web Site. You may include your DEIS format preference request with any comments you have on this scoping effort.

Sincerely,


JOE L. MEADE
Forest Supervisor